



Employee Spotlight: Bill Purtymun

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Snow Angel

Bill Purtymun

Several winters ago, Bill Purtymun and his fellow ski patrollers responded to a cry for help off in the trees while they were at the top of Pajarito Mountain. With a toboggan behind him, Bill skied downslope toward the cries. “We first thought the gentleman had skied into a tree,” Bill says. “It turned out he had suffered a severe injury and we had to cut a tree to get him out of the woods. He was taken off the mountain by toboggan and then airlifted from the ski area parking lot to the regional trauma center in Albuquerque.” Although Bill was the first on the scene, he notes the rescue effort involved many patrollers and even bystanders. “It’s a team effort. It really is,” he says.

An emergency planning hazard analyst with the Laboratory’s Planning and Analysis group (SAFE-PA), Bill is also assistant ski patrol director at Pajarito Mountain, where he brings 35 years of experience as a nationally registered Emergency Medical Technician Paramedic (EMT-P). Fortunately, ski and bike patrollers at Pajarito Mountain typically deal with less serious ailments such as altitude sickness, a tweaked knee, or a dislocated shoulder rather than a serious accident requiring an airlift.

Work worth doing

In any case, Bill says, “there’s gratification in working hard at work worth doing.” Sometimes the gratification has an external source: For his efforts during this rescue, Bill was awarded the National Ski Patrol’s Purple Merit Star, which honors a patroller for saving a human life through emergency care and the use of ski patrol skills.

In the summer months, Bill volunteers as a mountain bike patroller during lift-served bike and hike days at Pajarito Mountain. Mountain bike injuries typically don’t require the same kind of help from the patrollers as skiing injuries do. “Mountain bikers are usually wearing protective body armor, and they self-evacuate,” Bill says. “During a severe rain and lightning storm, we did bring a guy off the mountain in a truck who was pretty heavily concussed.”

An early introduction to service

At the Fédération Internationale des Patrouilles de Ski in Italy, Bill learned cross-cultural skills for treating patients who don't speak English.

Bill learned to ski at Santa Fe Ski Area at age six “on the Poma lifts that dragged you up the hill in your soaking wet Levi's,” and he participated in the Santa Fe public school program, but he didn't ski consistently through his teens.

By the age of 16, he was volunteering with mountain search and rescue, at 18 he was a nationally registered EMT and firefighter, and by 20 he was a paramedic. When he wasn't fighting fires or responding in ambulances, Bill worked for the Santa Fe Ski Patrol.

Always learning

A big part of being an EMT involves attending continuing education training, and Bill relishes this aspect of his work. “I enjoy taking classes, and I enjoy teaching,” he says. Three years ago he completed a master's degree from Arizona State University with an emphasis on mass casualty and emergency planning for ski areas. In April 2016, he attended a continuing education event in Italy with the Fédération Internationale des Patrouilles de Ski, where he learned cross-cultural skills for treating patients with other rescuers who don't speak English as a common language.

Bill has also taken avalanche training and is working toward his senior patroller certification. “I recently attended the International Snow Science Workshop in Breckenridge, Colorado,” he says. “The theme of the conference was a merging of theory and practice. For me, it was a chance to meet with snow science researchers and practitioners from around the globe to exchange ideas and experiences. It was also a great chance to embrace my inner snow nerd.”

On the teaching side, Bill recently became a certified CPR instructor, and he's especially proud to be an instructor trainer for outdoor emergency care under the National Ski Patrol system. The Outdoor Emergency Care courses include a young adult patroller program for high school students ages 15 to 18.

Giving

“I feel like I'm giving back to some of the younger folks, and I like watching them grow and succeed,” Bill explains. “I had really great mentors through the Explorer Scouts and Search and Rescue, and a lot of folks put time in for me as a young adult.”

The Pajarito Mountain ski and bike patrols are staffed primarily by volunteers, about 80 percent of whom are Lab employees, Bill says. “The work we do is always a team effort. The ski and bike patrols are a lot of fun, and the people involved are wonderful. It's like a family—they've got your back, and you've got theirs.”

A ceremony at the Fédération Internationale des Patrouilles de Ski.

Bill Purtymun works in the Laboratory's Planning and Analysis group (SAFE-PA).

Resources

- Follow these links to find out more about [Pajarito Mountain](#), the [Rocky Mountain Division of the National Ski Patrol](#), and the [National Ski Patrol](#).

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